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Heer-Ranjha: A Folk Tale from Pakistan

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About *Heer-Ranjha*:

For centuries, the Chenab River has been flowing through the soils of the Punjab, the land of five rivers, and its fast and furious waves have told tales of love and romance. *Heer-Ranjha* is one of the tales told in unison by the waters of the Chenab. The eternal season of love arrived in the Indian subcontinent a few years before the arrival of the Mughals in India in the early 16th century. Some of the tale-tellers assert that it belongs to Behlol Lodhi's era during the second half of the 15th century, but whichever era it belongs to, the timeless tale of *Heer-Ranjha* is told and heard with the same keenness today. This romance happened in the city of Jhang situated near the River Chenab. It is said that the river flowed nearer to the city in the past than where it is today.

The celebrated legend of *Heer-Ranjha* remained a part of the glorious oral literature of the Punjab. It was immortally recounted in Punjabi, popularly as *Heer Waris Shah*¹ by Sufi poet Waris Shah (1722-1798). Waris Shah's poetic version of the tale was translated into English by Charles Frederick Usborne (1874 – 1919) as *Waris Shah: The Adventures of Hir and Ranjha*².

The folk tale has also been made into several memorable Pakistani and Indian films in the Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi languages, with different titles such as *Heer*, *Heer Ranjha* and *Heer Sial*, etc.

The major source text for the present translation, however, was the Urdu prose version of Shafi Aqeel, included in his book called *Pakistan ke Lok Dastanain* (Folk Tales of Pakistan) published in 2008 by National Language Authority Pakistan.

¹ See <http://folkpunjab.com/kalam/waris-shah/>

² See <http://www.apnaorg.com/books/english/heer-ranjha/heer-ranjha.pdf>

Translation:

ONCE upon a time, when Jhang used to be a small town, people belonging to a caste called Siyal resided there. Mahr Choochak was the *chaudhary*³ of the town. The heroine of the romance was none other than his loving daughter, Heer, who is alive in many warm hearts even today. In this town of Siyals, Heer and Ranjha fell in immortal love, here the tale of their romance started, here their love reached its climax, here it met its tragic end.

The tale was actually initiated in District Sargodha, the birth place of Deedu Ranjha – the hero. In this district, there was a town called Takht Hazara where Moazzam, known as Moju, was the *chaudhary*. Moju was a noble landlord belonging to a caste called Ranjha Jat. He had eight sons with Deedu being the youngest of all. Owing to his caste, Deedu is known as Ranjha. All of his seven brothers were married but Ranjha was single yet. Moju Chaudhary had great love for Ranjha, partly because of his being single, partly because of being his father's old-age child, and mainly because of his beauty and innocence. Therefore, Ranjha was brought up by Moju Chaudhary with great love and care. Unlike his brothers, Ranjha didn't take any interest in farming. So he neither learnt how to plough nor how to sow and reap. He knew just one thing and that was playing magic with his musical instrument –the flute. With continuous practice, he got such a mastery over it that whosoever heard it was hypnotized. He would go from place to place and entertain the people of his town with the sweet melodies of his flute. His brothers loved him, yet they wanted him to help them in the fields. They would often complain:

“We work hard the whole day, and he wastes all his time on his flute.”

However, until their father, Moju, was alive, Ranjha's brothers and their wives kept their mouths sealed and couldn't harm him, but as soon as Moju breathed his last, their tongues were unlocked and they said to him:

“You have eaten much on charity, now you will have to do farming with us.”

³Chief of the town

Although his sisters-in-law greatly liked him, they also didn't approve of his idleness and rather said:

“Why does he sit home and eat free bread? Now, he must also work.”

In the beginning, they would say all this in a relatively polite manner but gradually their tone changed and they started taunting and snubbing him. Finally, one day, his brothers distributed the lands in the presence of some elderly figures of the town for the sake of authenticity. Deedu Ranjha was given barren and uneven lands. After being ostracized from his own house, he tried to work hard on his piece of the land. But his upbringing was different from that of his brothers. His gentle hands were unable to do work on the hard lands in harsh weathers. His feet swelled after a brief labor on the fields. On the other hand, he had to listen to the harsh words of his brothers and their wives too, which was unbearable for him. He was feeling helpless now.

Eventually, one day, he said to himself: ‘Now I can't live here; this town of Takht Hazara will not feed me anymore.’

At that time, he was young and famous for his attractive personality all around the region; on the other hand, there were many stories of the beauty of Heer from Jhang Siyal. Ranjha had also heard of her. One day, his eldest sister-in-law said sarcastically:

“Bring Siyals' Heer if you are so manly.”

This challenging statement, somehow, got permanently imprinted on his mind. It induced a strange desire in his heart. In fact, the hour of his departure from his native town, Takht Hazara, had arrived. He picked his beloved flute, put a blanket on his shoulder, cast a farewell look at his house, and, invoking Allah's blessings, set on a journey towards Chenab – towards his love, towards Jhang, towards troubles. His exuberant youth and wavy locks, that touched his neck, made him look more beautiful than ever before. In the upcoming days of exile, the only companion to be was his flute, which he kissed, and left the town playing gloomy tunes on it. He had no destination, no particular path to follow. He came out of Takht Hazara, and then started moving southwards, lovewards.

On the way, whenever he felt tired, he would sit in the shade of some tree to take rest, play sweet melodies on his flute to feed his soul with some energy, and then proceed. Night fell when he was still on his way. Seeing a village nearby, he thought to himself: 'Why not pass the night in this village? I will resume my journey in the morning.'

He went straight to the mosque of the village, and found it so comfortable that he decided to stay there for a few days before going ahead. Unfortunately, he indulged in a quarrel with the Maulvi Sahib⁴ on the first night of his stay there. An even worse blow to his plan was when some village girls visited the mosque in the morning to fetch water from its well. They saw Ranjha from Takht Hazara with their own eyes and fell in love with him. One of these girls was so madly in love with him that she went home and announced before her mother:

"I won't marry anyone in my life but this stranger staying in the mosque."

Finding her daughter under a serious love fever, the mother came to Ranjha and begged him to marry her daughter. But he was going to explore a different world – an unseen world, the world of Heer. He couldn't marry any girl other than her. So he had to refuse the proposal, and when the woman left for home, dejected, Ranjha thought: 'If I stay here anymore, I'll be caught in some trouble soon.'

So, very quietly, Ranjha left that village, and headed towards the River Chenab. He reached a place near the river where there was the *ghaat*⁵. Ranjha sat on one side to take some rest. From there, he could see houses, minarets of the mosques, and temples. On the other bank of the river, there stood Jhang, Heer's town, Ranjha's destination. After having taken some rest, he started playing his flute. The sweet voice of the flute, coupled with the mastery with which Ranjha played the tune, put even birds resting in the trees into a kind of ecstasy. In the meanwhile, a boat came towards the *ghaat* where Ranjha was sitting. The passengers in the boat had heard his sweet melody, and were as if under its spell. The boat drew nearer, and among other passengers, there were five saints on the boat. Happily, it is said, these five saints blessed Ranjha with Choochak's Heer!

⁴The religious figure who looks after the mosque and leads all the practices performed there.

⁵The point where people take boats to cross the river; a mini port; or a broad flight of steps leading down to the bank of a river

People started sitting on the boat as it was now ready to go to the other bank of the river. Ranjha went to the sailor and said innocently:

“I also want to go to the other bank of the river”.

The sailor, whose name was Ludon, inquired:

“Have you got money to pay the fare?”

Ranjha said:

“No, I don’t have any money”, and then indifferently said, “Well, no matter, I’ll swim across the river.”

Upon hearing this, the passengers requested Ludon to let Ranjha get on the boat. Ludon also felt sympathy with him, and reluctantly nodded. As soon as the sailor started rowing and the boat started floating on the waves of the river, Ranjha began to play his flute. His melodies transformed the mood of the atmosphere. The passengers were so lost in the trance that they didn’t even realize that they had reached the other bank. Ludon was also very pleased. When all the passengers had left, Ranjha asked Ludon:

“Who is this bed for?”

Ludon politely replied:

“This bed is for Mahr Choochak’s loving daughter, Heer. She owns the boat, too. She does boating in this river once in a while.”

Ranjha was tired of the long journey from Takht Hazara to the suburbs of Jhang. So he decided to take some rest on Heer’s *palang*⁶. He was aware of the kind of spell that his flute had cast on the sailor. ‘Why shouldn’t I take some rest here on this boat,’ he thought to himself.

He requested Ludon: “Allow me to sleep on this bed for a while. I’m dead tired.”

Ludon knew if Heer arrived there to find Ranjha sleeping on her bed, she would mind it. He knew about her wrath very well. But Ranjha had also proved to be a

⁶ A purpose made colorful bed, similar to charpoy

special guest. So he allowed Ranjha to sleep on her bed in the boat. Tired of walking a long distance on foot, Ranjha went into a deep sleep while Ludon got busy with his other work. It was a mere coincidence that just when Ranjha fell asleep on her bed, Heer reached the river with her friends. When she saw a stranger lying on her bed, she lost her temper and started shouting at Ludon.

“Who is sleeping on my bed? How dare you let a stranger do that?”

Heer and her friends had sticks in their hands which they used to hit Ludon. After that, it was Ranjha’s turn to be punished. Swinging her stick in the air, Heer went towards her bed where Ranjha had got up due to the noise created by the girls.

“Who are you, and how dare you go to my bed?” angrily asked Heer. In response, they say, Ranjha simply lifted his head and placing his chin on his right wrist, looked into her eyes and kept calm. Exuberant youth, long, wavy and black shiny hair, pink face, and captivating smile on his lips were a feast for Heer.

“I’m a passenger. I was tired of the long journey to your town, so I slept on your *palang* for a while – but I’m sorry for this mistake”, he said after a while.

But now, there was no need to apologize for the ‘mistake’. Heer had surrendered herself to the magnetic charm of handsome Ranjha. Her fury was replaced with love. At that moment, she loved everything: the river, the jungle, the boat, the *palang*, her friends, and even Ludon. Ranjha had also reached his destination. Throwing her stick towards the bushes on the bank, Heer inquired sweetly:

“Who are you? Where have you come from? And where are you going?”

Ranjha was to go nowhere now as he had already reached his ultimate destination. Heer also realized this. She sent her friends away and sat with Ranjha on their bed. This way they loved each other – it was love at first sight. For a long time, they kept talking to each other as if they had been two complementary souls parted long ago. When Heer was about to leave, she said to him:

“I’ll request my father to give you some job at my home. That will minimize the distances between us.”

Mahr Choochak had many buffaloes and he was actually in search of a good servant. Heer, his beloved daughter, recommended Ranjha. Mahr Choochak at once appointed him to look after his cattle. So, Heer, very wisely, made it possible for them to meet with each other regularly. Now it was a matter of routine that Ranjha would shepherd the buffaloes everyday to the jungle on the bank of the Chenab River, and Heer, accompanied by her friends, would also reach there, and talk with him. A time arrived when, addicted to each other's sweet company, they were unable to live without each other. Heer would bring *choori*⁷ with her that she would herself put in Ranjha's mouth with love. He, in turn, would play his flute and entertain her.

Love and fragrance can't be concealed, they say.

Their love also couldn't be kept hidden. Gradually, the romance started becoming the talk of the town. In the beginning, people mentioned it sotto voce but then they openly talked about it. Among them, Mahr Choochak's limping brother, Qaidu, was playing the leading role. He was a devil who did nothing but backbiting. He would spy on them every day. Eventually, one day, he spotted them sitting together in the woods. He came home and said to his brother Mahr Choochak: "Heer and Ranjha meet in the jungle. Their activities are shameful." Choochak had already received such complaints a couple of times but never believed in them as he trusted his daughter more than anyone else. He was not ready to pay attention to any such accusation. But, this time, the informant was his brother Qaidu. So, for the first time, Mahr Choochak was doubtful about his daughter. Still, he needed proof which Qaidu provided very soon.

One day, when Heer made *choori* for Ranjha and took it to him, Qaidu followed her in the disguise of a beggar and hid in the jungle away from them. When Heer went to fetch a glass of water for Ranjha, Qaidu went to her and begged for some *choori*, which she gave to him. He ran towards home and angrily threw the *choori* before Choochak, saying:

"Here take the proof. This *choori* is made only in your house and Heer takes it to Ranjha every day. I took some of it as alms. Don't you believe what I say?"

⁷A dessert made with chapatti, sugar and ghee.

Having seen the *choori*, Choochak was furious. But what could he do? It was his daughter's affair. His honor was at stake. He was afraid of the bad name that people would give to their family. In consultation with Qaidu, he fired Ranjha from his job immediately.

Mahr Choochak's buffaloes were now almost addicted to Ranjha's flute. Everyday he would play the flute and the buffaloes would follow him. Likewise, they used to come back to home on his flute-call. It is said that the buffaloes stopped grazing after Ranjha's departure, and rather were getting out of Choochak's control. On the other hand, Heer was in shock as she could never imagine parting ways with Ranjha. She would neither talk to anyone nor eat anything. She remained quiet all the time. Eventually, her mother took pity on her, and talked to Mahr Choochak:

"The enemies are blaming our daughter for nothing."

After a week, she diverted her husband's attention towards his buffaloes: "All the buffaloes are getting sick now. I suggest you should re-recruit Ranjha. He might not have left Jhang yet. You will never find such an obedient, selfless servant again."

Choochak was already repenting his decision of firing Ranjha. On the other hand, Ranjha, too, couldn't go away from Jhang. So, one day, Choochak sent for Ranjha and asked him to resume his duties the same day. Ranjha started shepherding Choochak's buffaloes again. But Heer's parents were on their guard now, watching Heer-Ranjha's activities carefully. Qaidu was again spying on them. Mahr Choochak, however, didn't pay much attention to what Qaidu reported. But it was their hard luck that one day Mahr Choochak himself saw Heer and Ranjha together in the jungle.

Seeing is believing.

What he saw was intolerable for him. At once, he invited all the elderly figures of the clan to his home and, with their consent, immediately accepted the marriage proposal for Heer, which he had already received from a clan called Kherras. Jubilant, all started preparing for Heer's wedding. But when Heer came to know about this arrangement, she became very sad. Among all the glow and glitter and

musical demonstrations that were being made ahead of the wedding day, Heer cried bitterly from dawn to dusk and told her mother blatantly:

“I’ll marry Ranjha and nobody else. That’s my decision.”

But now nobody was going to pay heed to what she said or did. Her only companion who could have listened to her was Ranjha but he had been fired again by Choochak, and had left the town.

In Muzzaffargarh region, there was a small town called Rungpur, where Chaudhary Aju was the chief of Kherra clan which was also related to the Siyal Rajputs of Jhang. It is said that one of the forefathers of the Siyal Rajputs, called Rai Siyal, had embraced Islam in the hands of respected Chishti Sufi saint Hazrat Baba Fareed Ganj-e-Shakar in 1258 AD. A man called Mal Khan is believed to have established Jhang. Aju Chaudhary also belonged to a sub-caste of Siyals and his son Saeda Kherra was going to marry Heer of Siyals. Heer’s parents were trying to marry her away as soon as possible and had, therefore, fixed a date for the wedding ceremony in haste. The Kherras were preparing to bring their Barat—the wedding party – with a lot of pump and show. Heer cried; she begged that she should not be married off in such a hurry; swore her life – but it was too late now. On the due date, the Kherras arrived with a lot of arrangements to take their daughter-in-law, Heer, with them to Muzzaffargarh. All the people of Jhang joyfully took part in Heer’s wedding ceremony. Both the parties were overjoyed. Heer’s clan was happy because their daughter was going to be a part of the Chaudhary Aju’s family, whereas the Kherras were happy because they were going to have the beauty of the town as their daughter-in-law. However, while all of them were enjoying themselves with the ceremonies, Heer was in a wretched state. There was no one to sympathize with her, no one to console her and nobody asked what she wanted, except when the Qazi came to her before reciting the Nikkah⁸ of Saeda Kherra and Heer Siyal:

“Do you accept Saeda Kherra, the son of Aju Chaudhary, to be your husband?” asked the Qazi as a formality.

⁸Religious obligation of public announcement using the given words bonding man and woman into a new relationship of husband and wife

“No, I don’t. My *nikkah* has already been recited. It was when five *peers*⁹ had given my hand to Ranjha while he was still on the other bank of the Chenab.”

But her rejection was of no use because the *nikkah* registrar, instead of fulfilling his religious obligation, was following his master, Mahr Choochak’s orders. Heer kept on crying but forcefully she was married off to Saeda Kherra. Her cries were buried under the noise made by the people who were greeting Mahr Choochak and Saeda Kherra. The Kherras put Heer in the *doli*¹⁰ and with a lot of festivity departed for Rungpur. Part of her, however, remained in Jhang, for Ranjha. Ranjha’s life was also destroyed when the Kherras took Heer away from him. His mind stopped working. He was left with nothing – no charm in life, no aim, no destination, no reason to stay alive. First, he thought of going to Rungpur after Heer but it would do no good except for adding troubles to his Heer’s life. So, embracing Heer’s love, he kept wandering about in Jhang for few days. This madness was not without method though. He stayed in Jhang to have ready access to some news, whatsoever, about Heer. However, one day, he became very gloomy and left for his own town, Takht Hazara.

His brothers and sisters-in-law had written many letters to Heer and requested her to send their brother back to Takht Hazara lest he was harmed by the Siyals of Jhang; yet, when he actually returned home, Ranjha was not received warmly by his brothers and sisters-in-law. It was so perhaps because they had also come to know about Heer’s wedding with Saeda Kherra and couldn’t accept the loss. They wanted to see Heer with Ranjha. Ranjha realized that there was no place on earth left for him in which to live. He was sick of this life. He was alive because the incense of Heer’s memory was still burning in his heart. But reaching her still seemed impossible.

At last, one day, driven by some unknown force, he started moving towards Jhelum wherein a village called Tilla of Jogis, there lived the most famous *jogi*¹¹

⁹ Sages, dervish

¹⁰ A small sedan purposefully well decorated to carry the bride

¹¹ Ascetic, sadhu

of that time, Guru Ball Nath, who used to bless people visiting him with his *jog*¹². Ranjha went to see the Guru and requested him:

“Guru Ji, I want to become your *chela*¹³.”

The Guru read Ranjha’s beautiful face and concluded that he was brought up in a much pampered manner.

“One needs to bear a lot of hardships in order to become a chela, has to undergo tough tests. How can a gentle creature like you face all such troubles?”

Ranjha narrated his sad love story and told him how he had undergone many sufferings already. Guru Ball Nath, after having listened to his tale, thought to himself: “He has already experienced the bitter realities of life. He has already trodden those dangerous paths which are necessary to qualify for jog.”

He ordered Ranjha to come close, placed his hand on Ranjha’s head, gave his blessings, and accepted him as his chela. Immediately, thereafter, Ranjha’s ears were pierced and earrings were put in them. His Self was dyed in the color of the jog. Ranjha was lucky to have got this jog in a few minutes. For some days, he stayed at his Guru’s *asthan*¹⁴, and then with his Guru’s consent, left for Rungpur, the real motive behind his jog.

In the suburbs of Rungpur, there was a garden called Kala Bagh –the black garden. Ranjha decided to camp in the garden. He made a small hut and started practicing his jog. On the second day, he took his *kashkol*¹⁵ in his right hand and started walking in the streets of Rungpur with a mission to locate and have access to Heer. The news of a beautiful young *jogi*’s arrival in Kala Bagh started spreading in Rungpur. It also reached Heer’s sister-in-law, Sehti, who was Heer’s confidante. Out of curiosity, Sehti went to visit Kala Bagh along with her friends. There, she witnessed Ranjha’s captivating beauty in the guise of a *jogi* – a young man wearing the *jogi* costume but behaving differently from other *jogis*. She

¹² The practice of being a jogi

¹³ A follower, a servant

¹⁴ Place, ascetic’s household

¹⁵ Begging bowl

started talking to him with an intention to extract the truth behind this jog. She even argued with him to know the *jogi*'s reality.

On her return, Sehti expressed her doubt before her sister-in-law, Heer, at home telling her that there was a wonderful *jogi* staying at Kala Bagh, and that it seemed as if he did so in order to hide his identity. Heer, having firm faith in Ranjha's love, started thinking that it could be Ranjha in the disguise of a *jogi*.

On the other hand, Ranjha didn't know where Aju Chaudhary's house was, and he could not inquire anyone about it. So, he had to wander about all the streets of Rungpur, scanning all the houses for Heer. Eventually, one day, his fortune brought him to Aju's doorstep. He raised a jogi slogan and then begged.

"Give some food to this *faqeer*¹⁶ in Allah's name; He will give you the best return."

Hearing the *alakh*¹⁷ slogan, Sehti went to the door and opened it. She was stunned to find the *jogi* from Kala Bagh standing in front of her. Impulsively, she brought some grains, and put them into Ranjha's begging bowl. But Ranjha was not there for alms. He was there to have a look at his Heer – his life, his world. His eyes were in search of someone, Sehti noted. Cheerful and lovely Sehti finally said softly:

"You got the alms; now go away."

But how could Ranjha leave without having the alms of Heer's sight? He dropped his bowl deliberately. Everything in the begging pot was scattered in the lawn, and Ranjha started shouting at her:

"You have dropped the alms of this poor beggar. You are so proud of your beauty ... You don't fear Allah... Fear this beggar's curse, I warn you."

No doubt Sehti was beautiful but she wasn't proud of her beauty. She was proud only of her love – Murad Baloch. At first, she was perplexed by the accusations of

¹⁶ A mendicant dervish

¹⁷ The Invisible, the Creator; a slogan to announce His oneness

the *jogi*, but then she also replied angrily, and started quarrelling with the *jogi*. After all, Choudharys' blood ran through her veins too.

Noticing the noise, Heer came out of her room. This was what Ranjha had longed for. His dramatic act made his dream come true. Heer saw the *jogi* while his eyes drank from the lavish sight of Heer. Both identified each other, exchanged smiles. Ranjha extended his bowl towards her, she squeezed herself as if trying to pack her in the bowl. Sehti could see Heer-Ranjha's souls in love with each other.

Ranjha's plan had perfectly worked. He went back happily to his hut in Kala Bagh, and Heer got another life. Since her arrival in Kherra's house, Heer was alive because of the belief that Ranjha would, one day, come to Rungpur and take her away from there. And now he had come. All this while, Heer had not allowed Saeda Kherra to even touch her. Her sister-in-law, Sehti, had been a great support. She was her trusted friend. So Heer told Sehti the truth:

"He's not a *jogi*; in disguise, he's my Ranjha."

Sehti could understand as she was herself in love with Murad Baloch. She also needed Heer's help to reach Murad Baloch. So she started arranging secret meetings for Heer and Ranjha. One day, she did a do-or-die act. She took Heer to the fields, along with her other friends. There, Heer's foot fell on a thorn and started bleeding. Sehti manipulated it into an opportunity and started shouting that a snake had bitten Heer's foot. She convinced Heer as well to perform the act flawlessly. Obedient to her trusted friend, Heer pretended to have lost her senses. Sehti applied some *haldi*¹⁸ to Heer's face which gave it a pale look. Then, all the friends hurriedly brought Heer home where all the family members were also concerned. They started thinking of the best ways to extract poison out of Heer's body. Eventually, when they decided to go to Ved Hakeem to bring some medicine, Sehti came up with a suggestion:

"A *jogi* is staying in a hut in Kala Bagh. He is believed to be the perfect healer as he knows how to cure the snake bite. Go and bring him quickly."

¹⁸ Turmeric

Some of the men immediately went to Kala Bagh and brought the *jogi* to Aju's home. Ranjha, in *jogi*'s disguise, raised his *alakh* slogan, and looked around as if sensing the seriousness of the situation. Heer opened her eye slightly to look at her Ranjha. In the meanwhile, Sehti came forward and begged the *jogi*:

“Guru Ji, have mercy on us and save our *bhabhi*'s¹⁹ life; heal her wound, please. A poisonous snake has bitten her.”

Ranjha uttered some words in an undertone as if saying some *mantar*²⁰. He felt her pulse, looked critically at her face, opened her eyes (Again! her soul smiled), looked at her heels, and then said in a sad tone:

“Seems it was a very dangerous snake.” He took a deep breath. Then raising his voice, he addressed them all:

“All of you, leave this room; only a virgin girl may stay inside. Be quick.”

Obviously, the virgin girl to stay there was Sehti. Ranjha and Sehti were left in the room to do away with the ‘venom’. Sehti locked the door. They bloomed with joy, as their drama was a success so far. Sehti told her family that the *jogi* would say the *mantar* in solitude and it would take him a couple of days to completely remove the poison from Heer's body. No one but Sehti would be allowed to go into their room during the healing days. At any cost, the family wanted Heer to stay alive so they faithfully acted upon the *jogi*'s advice.

Heer, Ranjha and Sehti wanted to take maximum advantage of this wonderful opportunity. They had a detailed discussion, and started thinking of the ways to escape from there. Sehti had also sent for Murad Baloch, who reached there on a camel. At midnight, they broke out of the room by digging a big hole into its back wall. In the dark of the night, Heer and Ranjha ran to one side, and Murad and Sehti, on camel, went in another direction. The next morning, when the Kherras brought breakfast for them, and knocked at the door to call Sehti to open it and take breakfast, they got no reply. They kept on knocking at the door for quite some time but to no use. Eventually, they broke the door open, and to their bewilderment, the room was empty. The inmates –Heer, Sehti or the *jogi* – had

¹⁹Sister-in-law

²⁰ Sacred utterances that are repeated for certain effects such healing, etc.

disappeared. They could only see the big hole in the wall. At first, they were confused. They were shocked and infuriated. Then, they discussed the matter and concluded that the *jogi* had taken their Honor away. Heer and Sehti were the honor of the whole town.

Run, run, run. Catch them. They mustn't have gone far yet, they shouted.

At once, the Kherras rode fast horses and went to chase the escaping couples. In different battalions, they went in all four directions. Sehti and Murad Baloch were on camel so they had gone far away. Even then, the Kherras chased them, and were about to attack them when men of Baloch tribes came for their rescue and forced the Kherras to retreat. So Murad succeeded in taking his beloved away with him. Another party of the Kherras found Heer and Ranjha fast asleep in a jungle –Ranjha's head resting on Heer's lap. Seeing this, the Kherras were infuriated. They arrested them, beat Ranjha brutally, and leaving him half dead there, took Heer away from him back to Rungpur. Ranjha, after having regained his senses, went to the court of Raja Adli and begged for justice.

"Who are you and why do you cry?" asked the Raja.

"I have heard much about your justice, O Raja. But in your jurisdiction, the Kherras have looted me of my love. They have taken my Heer away from me," said Ranjha, weeping bitterly.

Raja Adli ordered his force to arrest the Kherras, and present them before him.

When they were brought to his court, they also begged for justice.

"Maharaj, this *jogi* is a fraud. In the disguise of a healer, he came to kidnap our daughter-in-law. He took our honor away with him. We beg you to penalize him."

The Raja was unable to reach the truth behind all this. He saw a dervish in Ranjha's person. However, he dismissed his court and ordered the Qazi of the region to hear both the parties and give his decision.

After a proper hearing, the Qazi gave his verdict:

"Ranjha is a cheat and fraud. So, Heer should stay with the Kherras."

In this way, Saeda Kherra got Heer again. Ranjha went away, crying bitterly. He prayed to God:

“O Allah, Adli Raja did injustice to me. I beg you to be Just to me and inflict Your wrath on his town.”

Ranjha’s request was promptly heard by God, in a few moments, the whole town was surrounded by a fierce fire. People were scared to death. When Raja Adli came to know about it, he ordered:

“Arrest the Kherras immediately and find the *jogi*. Bring that woman too.”

After a few hours, the Kherras and Heer were again present in Raja Adli’s court. The Raja gave Heer’s hand to Ranjha, saying:

“O *jogi*, please forgive us. Heer belongs to you. Here, she goes with you.”

The Kherras were left with no choice but to obey. Ranjha and Heer were now united. Where should they go?

“Let’s go to my town Takht Hazara,” said Ranjha.

“No, your brothers will not accept us and will curse me for eloping with you. Now that Raja Adli has ordered us to be united, no one will object to our marriage. So let’s go to Jhang Siyal first, and get married honorably.”

So they went to Jhang Siyal. There, they were warmly welcomed by Heer’s parents, who said to Ranjha:

“Now we have no objection to your marriage. But it should happen respectably. So it will be better that you go to Takht Hazara and bring your wedding *barat*²¹ formally. We want to celebrate Heer’s marriage with all zeal and zest.”

Ranjha had no objection to it. He was rather happy to share the memorable moments of his life with his family. He left Heer at her parents’ home and left for Takht Hazara. On his way back to his home town, he thought how happy his brothers and sisters-in-law would be to hear about his imminent marriage to Heer.

²¹A wedding party

Lost in similar thoughts, he reached his home, where his brothers received him very happily. His sisters-in-law were also very happy to have seen him after a long time. Their excitement had no bounds when he narrated the whole account to them. They started preparing for Ranjha's marriage to Heer of Siyals. The whole town of Takht Hazara was in a kind of festivity.

But Heer's father Mahr Choochak was not that kind-hearted. He had, in fact, tricked Ranjha. After he left Jhang Siyal, Mahr Choochak started thinking of plans to finish Heer. He invited all the decision makers of his family to his home and said:

"The story of Heer and Ranjha is the talk of the town now. If we allow Heer to go away with Ranjha, we will be named and remembered as *be-ghairat*²² everywhere from Jhang to Muzzaffargarh. We must prevent this infamy of giving in to an ordinary servant."

They decided unanimously that Heer be poisoned to death.

So, Heer – Ranjha's love and life – was killed by Siyals. However, what they told other people was that she was sick and had died. They even sent a messenger to Takht Hazara to deliver the news of Heer's death. Ranjha, along with his *barat*, was about to set off for Jhang, when the messenger reached him and delivered this paralyzing news. They say, after hearing of Heer's death, Ranjha could labor for only a few long breaths and then fell on the ground. His brothers leapt forward to pick him. But he had already breathed his last, in order to go to where his Heer was already.

Their tragic death saddened everyone from Takht Hazara to Jhang Siyal. It was then, they say, that the Chenab River distanced itself from Jhang, disowned it. Its waves tell the tale of Heer-Ranjha, and cry. Then the whole atmosphere echoes with the melodious sound of Ranjha's flute. The waves go dancing to its tunes. *We belong to Heer's palang; we belong to Ranjha's flute; we belong to their love; not to Jhang, nor to Kherras*, they say.

²² Cowards having no honor and sense of self respect